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TAGS: PGOV PREL ES
SUBJECT: FUNES MENTOR ON APPOINTMENTS, SECURITY,
INTELLIGENCE

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Funes advisor and confidant Hato Hasbun, now Secretary for Strategic Issues in the Presidency, sees his role in part as preventing bureaucracy from stalling needed reforms and policy initiatives. He sees the value added of Salvadoran Intelligence as analysis more than collection, and will serve as an intermediary between the President and the intelligence services. He said the Funes Administration will soon address significant budgetary shortfalls and intends to govern the country for the national good, not strictly adhering to the desires of FMLN interests. He said VP and Education Minister Sanchez Cerén would be well-placed to negotiate with Salvadoran teachers. He acknowledged Public Security Minister Melgar's position in the command of the organization responsible for the 1985 Zona Rosa attack that killed four U.S. Marine Security Guards. He said Funes would make a prime-time address June 18 to announce measures to combat crime, including involving the armed forces, increasing the size of the police force, and rehabilitation programs. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Emboffs met June 17 with Hato Hasbun, Secretary for Strategic Issues in the Funes Administration. This position is one created by President Funes after his inauguration. He said the idea of a Secretary for Strategic Issues stemmed from asking how the Funes Administration could best ensure policy coordination. Hasbun said his role would also be to serve as an intermediary between Funes and the Salvadoran State Intelligence Organization (OIE). When pressed as to OIE's formal reporting chain, Hasbun said OIE Director Linares would report directly to the President, but would also report to the President through Hasbun. Hasbun said his vision of OIE's role was that its focus should be analytical and advisory more than merely collection.

¶3. (C) Hasbun said the Funes Administration is still in the early stages and has inherited a mess, in terms of both corruption and budget. He said the Administration will move soon to control spending. Hasbun marveled at what he saw as extremely high GOES expenditures to "vendors," though he did not provide specific examples. Hasbun said Funes is energized and optimistic about his term as President, but believes it is far too early to begin to judge success or failure. He said both he and Funes remain convinced of the need for reforms to the electoral process in order to improve transparency. He said those reforms had to include legislation on access to information (along the lines of the U.S. FOIA). Hasbun said that the Funes Administration would follow through on its pledge to govern for all Salvadorans, not just the ruling party. He said he had recently held a meeting with the Salvadoran National Private Enterprise Association (ANEP), in which he made the same assertion, and asked ANEP leadership if it, too, was ready to put national interests over private and personal interests. The answer, he said, was noncommittal.

Controversial Appointments

¶4. (C) Hasbun noted that of all the controversial appointments made by Funes, the one garnering the most attention by Salvadorans was VP Salvador Sanchez Ceren as Education Minister. He observed that the Embassy had not focused much on Sanchez Ceren's appointment, and said Sanchez Ceren was in a unique position as a former teacher to negotiate agreements with Salvadoran teachers and their union. Emboffs observed that many Salvadorans were concerned that Sanchez Ceren would try to make ideological changes to school curricula. Hasbun responded that, if this were the GOES' goal, Funes would have named a different Education Minister, since Sanchez Ceren comes to the post with ideological baggage that would make implementing such changes difficult.

¶5. (C) Hasbun commented on other controversial appointments, and said that while Humberto Centeno, Minister of Governance, was indeed a proposal made by the FMLN, it was welcomed by Funes, who sees Centeno as pragmatic and capable. Discussing Minister of Public Security Manuel Melgar, Hasbun offered his service on the Public Security Committee of the Legislative Assembly in years past as a qualification for the appointment. Regarding Melgar's involvement in the 1985 Zona Rosa attack that killed four U.S. Embassy Marine Security Guards, Hasbun quickly asserted he had personal knowledge Melgar was not in the Zona Rosa the day of the attack. However, he acknowledged that Melgar was in the top ranks of the command structure of the Central American Workers Revolutionary Party (PRTC), which took credit for the attack, at the time.

¶6. (C) Hasbun said fears that PARLACEN Deputy Jose Luis Merino (aka Ramiro) was somehow running GOES policy were not credible. Merino, he said, has significant influence in the FMLN, but does not run the GOES. Funes, Hasbun said, has made clear in tense meetings, with both Hasbun and Merino present, that he is running the GOES to the benefit of El Salvador, not in order to satisfy the hard line of the FMLN.

Funes to Announce Security Program

¶7. (C) Hasbun previewed Funes' prime-time television address June 18 to announce economic and security measures. The announcement included a significant role for the Salvadoran Armed Forces to support the National Civilian Police (PNC) in patrols. Funes also announced the immediate incorporation of two police academy classes into the PNC in order to increase quickly the number of police. Long term, Hasbun said, the Funes Administration will look to increase the size of the PNC, currently some 16,000, though he gave no specific targets, nor did he explain how the increases would be accomplished. Funes' proposals also include increased efforts to rehabilitate criminals. Hasbun criticized previous ARENA governments for not managing to control Salvadoran prisons, instead they effectively abandoned them to street gangs. Hasbun suggested ARENA officials must have had something to gain in perpetuating the public security crisis in El Salvador, noting that the private security industry in the country dwarfs the PNC and other state security entities.

Comment

¶8. (C) Hasbun is clearly a man with feet in two different camps, both the FMLN and inside Mauricio Funes' inner circle of advisors and confidants. His tone and body language when discussing Merino suggests significant deference to the man, though Hasbun was at pains to convince us Merino's influence drops significantly outside the FMLN. Nonetheless, it is clear that Hasbun is sensitive to concerns that FMLN hard-liners will control the Funes Administration. His comments to the effect that Funes has the FMLN under control are interesting, but also self-serving.

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